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SUBJECT: PHILIPPINES PREPARES FOR ILO HIGH-LEVEL MISSION ON
LABOR RIGHTS

REF: A. 08 STATE 90849 (PHILIPPINES GSP PETITION:
REQUEST FOR INTERIM DEMARCHE)
B. 08 MANILA 1709 (AMBASSADOR ENGAGES FOREIGN
SECRETARY)

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Philippine government is prepared to welcome and provide its full support to next week's High-Level Mission from the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Geneva headquarters to investigate allegations of labor rights abuses as well as eight ongoing complaints filed with the ILO. Senior officials at the Department of Labor and Employment told the Embassy September 18 that they had successfully arranged meetings for the ILO with key agencies, offices, and committees in all three branches of government, including the Philippine Economic Zone Authority, and were prepared to fully cooperate and receive the ILO's recommendations. Noting that a preponderance of the ILO Mission's schedule was dedicated to meeting nongovernmental and labor groups, some of which are highly critical of the government, the officials expressed concern the ILO would be predisposed to give less credence to the government's views or would have an unrealistic expectation for progress on any proposed legislative reforms -- which could be difficult given the tight end-of-year congressional calendar and the approaching May 2010 general elections. Nonetheless, Philippine officials said they were determined to make the most of the ILO's visit, and would take advantage of the ILO's offer to lead a symposium on labor standards at the visit's conclusion. End Summary.

COMMITTED TO A SUCCESSFUL VISIT

12. (SBU) Undersecretaries at the Philippine Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) in a September 18 meeting with us expressed their full support for the September 22-29 High-Level Mission from the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Geneva headquarters to investigate allegations of labor rights abuses as well as eight ongoing complaints filed with the ILO. The first day of the three-member ILO team's visit, they explained, will include a meeting with Presidential Executive Secretary and Chairman of the Presidential Human Rights Committee Eduardo Ermita, as well as a multiagency meeting featuring Cabinet-level and other senior officials from the Department of Interior and Local Government, the Philippine National Police, the Armed Forces of the Philippines, and many others. Despite DOLE's concerns earlier this year about being able to arrange meetings with the fiercely independent legislative and judicial branches, DOLE officials confirmed that the ILO will meet the chairs of both House and Senate labor committees as well as Supreme Court Chief Justice Reynato Puno. DOLE will also facilitate visits to factories in the metro-Manila region in Tarlac and Laguna provinces, in cooperation with the Philippine Economic Zone Authority.

GOVERNMENT'S MESSAGE COULD BE DROWNED-OUT

13. (SBU) With a preponderance of the ILO's meetings scheduled with labor unions, human rights groups, and some organizations known to harbor strong views against the government, the DOLE officials expressed concern that the ILO would be predisposed to hearing negative messages and could therefore be less inclined to give credit to the government's opinions and achievements. They also expressed concern about the potential for unrealistic expectations that the Philippine government could take immediate action on the ILO's recommendations for new legislation -- which would be extremely challenging in view of the October recess in Congress and the politically charged atmosphere surrounding the May 2010 general elections. Still, even if they did not have an opportunity to fully explain their views and concerns, the officials assured that they were committed to listening to the ILO's comments.

AT END OF VISIT, TRAINING AND DEBRIEFING

14. (SBU) DOLE officials said they looked forward to the two-day international symposium on labor standards at the end of the ILO Mission's visit, noting that it would provide quality training for DOLE's labor officers. DOLE's scheduled debrief with the ILO, they said, will be a useful cap on the week-long visit, enabling them to understand what type of recommendations the ILO might include in their final report. The officials said that they looked forward to reading the conclusions from the ILO Mission's report and to finding ways

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they could work with the ILO to address the concerns that are raised.

KENNEY